

# CREST: Post-Award FAQs

## Concept

CREST program staff encounter a number of frequently asked questions (FAQs). For the purposes of these tip sheets, such questions have been partitioned into lists most applicable before, during and after award. These are the most common questions, and the answers provided are given in the name of consistency for all applicants and awardees. Once you have browsed this list, as well as the information on the preceding tip sheets and the CREST Best Practices Manual, you should be well briefed on what makes a good CREST. Of course you may still have other questions, or may wish to suggest a new “FAQ” for these pages. In that case, you are welcome to contact the CREST program directly.

## What project-related documentation must be retained and for how long?

At a minimum, all correspondence to and from NSF, financial records and reconciliation, personnel data, participant demographics, evaluation reports, prior audits and lists of final award outputs (publications, patents, presentations) should be kept on file. Since it is not unusual for a project closed for a decade or more to be reexamined, copies of these documents should be kept on file at the institution and with the project PI for at least 10 years.

## How detailed should final reports be?

Final reports should revisit the goals and objectives of the proposal and explain how these goals were or were not reached. Publication, patent and presentation lists should be complete with full, searchable citations (including draft or in-process publications). Demographics of direct CREST participants, by year; research outcomes, by year; summaries of financial expenses; and a summary narrative by the PI and Co-PIs are also eligible for final reports. Except by prior agreement, final reports are due no later than 90 days after the end of the Cooperative Agreement.

## When is a no-cost extension appropriate?

Contrary to popular opinion, a grantee-approved no-cost extension is not a “freebee” to be used at will by the PI. Particularly in the case of a Cooperative Agreement, temporal accountability is as important as financial accountability. Goals and objectives, staffing levels, participant numbers and contingencies for these are all part of a good strategic plan. Beginning in Year 1, if the project staff senses a significant shortfall in project outcomes or expenses, the CREST program staff should be consulted as soon as possible. This is a good example why annual report news need not all be good news. Work with your program officer to hit your targets on time and on budget.

### **When should I apply for a CREST phase II?**

This answer will be specific to the progress of your particular CREST. It will depend on the Center's success in meeting its Phase I goals, the outcomes of site visits and reverse site visits, and the advisement of the project's advisory committees and auditors. Available program funding and the appraisal of the NSF program also are also a consideration. There should be enough overlap between the phase I and phase II projects to avoid squandering undue time or finances, but enough overlap to properly complete some phase I efforts in favor of phase II extensions. Keeping in mind the role of NSF and CREST to support cutting-edge research, phase II proposals should extend the spirit and successes of the phase I work while not being a rote duplication of the phase I proposal.

### **Can unexpended funds be rolled over?**

This will depend on the type and amount of the unexpended funds and the details of the Cooperative Agreement. Though exceptions may arise, in general, if the grant has been administered "on time and on budget," there should not be significant unexpended funds without advance notification, justification and discussion with the NSF program officer.

### **Should we document how we will sustain the NSF supported efforts?**

Absolutely. No amount of federal support can last forever. A plan for self-sufficiency (autonomy) should be built into the strategic plan and used to continue the project's momentum after NSF funding ends. The plans for continuing momentum should ideally begin in the final one to two years of the Cooperative Agreement. The updated status of these plans can be included in your final report. The final report itself may be amended to include late-breaking information in this regard.

### **What acknowledgement should be made to NSF on CREST- related publications?**

Typically some version of "this work was supported in part by National Science Foundation award number #####" is sufficient. Interested readers may then lookup the on-line abstract for the award to learn its details. It is appreciated, though not necessary, to specify the CREST program, as by giving attribution to "NSF award CREST-#####"

### **Sources and Further Reading**

The CREST program solicitation

Online at <http://www.nsf.gov/pubsys/ods/getpub.cfm?nsf04574>

The NSF *Grant Proposal Guide* (GPG)

Online at <http://www.nsf.gov/pubsys/ods/getpub.cfm?gpg>

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